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'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'



Justice, capabilities, entitlements? Deepening social analysis of vulnerability to volcanic hazards

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This presentation explores the relevance to volcanic risk of concepts of justice, capabilities and entitlements – concepts which have been broadly applied in the development research arena, but only sporadically utilised in disasters research (most prominently for famine). The recognition within the DRR movement that vulnerability is shaped fundamentally by social as well as by physical factors should pose justice-oriented concerns about why some social groups are more susceptible to hazard impacts than others. Differential vulnerability is shaped not only by what is at risk (including personal safety, home, and farming activities), but also by people's capabilities to protect themselves and their assets and to recover from the aftermath of hazard events. Capabilities are shaped by access to resources and interventions (including access to support systems and critical infrastructure). Access, in turn, can be articulated through the concept of 'entitlements': in this case to reduction of disaster risk. We can view all this via analysis of four elements: (a) Resources to self-protect (e.g. knowledge of evacuation drill, strength of roof to withstand ash-fall) contributing to pre-event prevention/mitigation/preparedness; (b) Resources to self-recover (e.g. to restore income, rebuild home) contributing to post-event recovery; (c) External protection (e.g. land use controls, diversion structures, early warning systems) contributing to pre-event prevention/mitigation/preparedness; (d) External relief/recovery intervention and access to essential services (e.g. search-and-rescue, shelter, health care, secure electricity, livelihood rehabilitation, rebuilding) contributing to post-event recovery. In this presentation we draw on research with the communities living around three case study volcanoes in Ecuador, St Vincent and Colombia to explore the utility of such an approach to analysis. The central focus is on how people can (or cannot) secure entitlement to the resources, assets and social structures needed to reduce vulnerability to hazards and ultimately to protect human wellbeing in the face of volcanic risk.